CHAPTER IX

Conclusions

MAJOR DIFFERENCES in cohesion and in the factors that promote it exist among the four armies studied. The North Vietnamese and the Israeli armies have achieved significant degrees of cohesion and combat effectiveness through policies designed to promote cohesion and to take advantage of positive and negative societal effects on their armed forces. A product of a very unique society and political system, the Soviet Army has relied primarily on its ability to control its soldiers totally, to manage manifestations of societal conflict within the Soviet Army, and to use the great legitimacy of the "motherland" within Soviet society to create some cohesive and effective units—but units still with major defects. Only in the US Army have policies and practices been instituted that consistently fail to promote cohesion.

The US Army faces fundamental cohesion and effectiveness problems. Largely as a result of a mode of decisionmaking based on emphasizing the quantifiable and easily measured factors involved in cost-effectiveness analysis and also as a result of political expediency, the US Army, over the past two decades, has arrived at a set of policies that permeate almost all aspects of the organization—personnel, legal, logistical, and operational—

and prevent the implementation of practices necessary to create cohesive units.

Recent attempts to institute a regimental system indicate recognition of the problem. Unfortunately, even if successfully implemented as now planned, the regimental system will not resolve the core problems involved in building cohesion at squad, platoon, and company levels.

The NVA and Israeli armies are almost textbook examples of how to create and maintain a cohesive army within the context of each army's unique society and political system. Both recognize that modern warfare requires that the successful army rely upon a strong sense of internalized discipline that places loyalty and responsibility to unit objectives as the highest good. NVA and Israeli leaders recognized the need for an internalized control system, and each in its geographic area of conflict created an army surpassing any other in the "human element." Positive control down to the individual soldier was ensured within each army by binding him to his unit through creating unit stability and integrity and by ensuring that the unit provided the basis for the soldier's primary social affiliation. Within each army, the primary group or small unit formed the "cutting edge" of the organization—the instrument that could physically achieve the policy objectives sought by each army. This "cutting edge" was maintained through a normative control system that emphasized service and responsibility to the unit or group. Commonality of values through socialization or resocialization once in the army, peer surveillance, demands for conformity, and the individual soldier's personal conviction that he was fully committed to his term of service all worked to maintain the pervasive influence of the small group over the behavior of the individual soldier for the purpose of achieving objectives in both armies.

Societal impacts on both armies were not significant hindrances to the promotion of cohesion, and in most cases the potential for nationalism contributed significantly to the commonality of values and ability to communicate necessary to create cohesive units. North Vietnamese and Israeli soldiers were also exposed to an intense resocialization process that, building upon common cultural values, established dominant rules of behavior under the control of small-unit leaders. A significant difference

between the two armies occurred in policies designed to maintain the dominance of the small unit over the behavior of the individual soldiers. Within the North Vietnamese Army fighting in South Vietnam, isolation was effectively used to separate main force soldiers from extended or significant contact with civilians or non-unit members. Within the Israeli Army, frequent contact with other unit members was the general practice, but only because of demanding training and operational requirements that tended to keep soldiers close to their units. When extended contacts with Israeli civilians occurred, the cohesive norms of the small unit were generally reinforced by a supportive Israeli population—a factor that did not generally exist for the NVA within South Vietnam.

Leadership and accompanying policies evident in the approach to leadership in the Israeli and North Vietnamese armies are excellent; they significantly promote cohesion. In both armies, leadership at the small-unit level is given priority. The best leaders available in each society are dedicated to their respective armies and to the task of controlling the many small groups that emerge in all armies; they lead these groups to achieve the objectives of each army. In both armies, leadership authority is maximized to promote the leader's ability to influence and control his unit. Authority in these armies is not centralized at higher levels; small-unit leaders have the necessary authority to build cohesive units and have generally succeeded in using positive societal effects to promote cohesion, while blocking or minimizing negative societal effects.

Through careful management of soldier assignments and other policies at the unit level, the Soviet Army has been able to control the negative effects of ethnic conflict and of other sources of conflict evident within Soviet society. Within the high-priority, mostly Slavic units of the Soviet Army, relatively little ethnic conflict exists. On the other hand, such conflict does exist in construction and other low-priority units that receive a greater mix of ethnic types. For some purposes, it appears that the Soviets have created two different armies. In one, they seem willing to accept ethnic conflict and loss of cohesion in order to avoid the dangers of creating "national" units and to promote "Russification" of Soviet society. In the second—the more elite combat

units, comprised of more "reliable" Slavs—the Soviets appear to have achieved a remarkable degree of cohesion.

Underlying the cohesion the Soviets have achieved in their priority units are two major factors. Through unit-level policies, the Soviet Army ensures that the Soviet soldier's main social affiliations and his dominant primary group are almost always found within the soldier's immediate unit. The other factor is the enormous degree of legitimacy within Soviet society attributed to the state or the "motherland" and to the Army as the principal defender of these almost universal values.

Although strong primary groups exist within Soviet units and although they usually give full patriotic support to the motherland and accept the legitmacy of the Soviet Army, they do not always develop small-group norms congruent with Soviet Army objectives. Upper-level Soviet leaders recognize the requirement for a normative approach to leadership, based more upon personal relationships between small-unit leaders and their soldiers, and to some extent are taking measures to further it. Little progress has been achieved in these efforts because of serious systemic defects that are well entrenched in the policies and practices that dominate the current Soviet approach; these are manifested in how the Soviet Army selects, trains, and controls NCOs and junior officers. Though also true of the overall Soviet approach, the system that guides lower-level unit leaders rewards narrow specialization with limited responsibility and a rigid, managerial, nonpersonal approach in dealing with subordinates. Nowhere below the general staff level does there appear to be an institutional focus where responsibility rests. Instead, especially at lower-level units, commanders appear to spend significant time and effort ensuring that they are not responsible. Soviet Army leaders are further hindered in promoting cohesion by severe limitations on the initiative they are allowed, especially at the small-unit level. They are expected to follow regulations and operational plans exactly. Though the need for initiative is recognized, especially if the normative approach necessary to cohesion is to be implemented, the system actually tolerates little initiative. Because of the system's need to fix responsibility for any failure, the exercise of initiative usually exposes the leader to criticism or more severe action. As a result, leaders are careful to abide fully by the rules and written

guidance. If there is then a failure, they cannot be held responsible.

Given the nature of the Soviet system, the development of a normative leadership approach necessary to promote military cohesion characterized by congruence between small-group norms and Army objectives is unlikely. As a result, the cohesion that presently exists within small units will probably support the established Soviet style of warfare where small units and their leaders are expected to meet objectives according to an established and well-regulated plan. Given unexpected contingencies and the "friction" of war, especially at the small-unit level, cohesion within Soviet units will tend to unravel as small units and their leaders become increasingly unable to cope with rapidly developing and unexpected situations.

Alone among the four armies studied, the US Army has lost control over the individual soldier to the extent that the creation of cohesive units is extremely difficult in all except some elite ranger and airborne or geographically-isolated units. For most US soldiers, the unit does not provide the source of primary social affiliations. As a result, the American soldier tends to seek esteem, recognition, and his main social affiliations beyond the influence of his unit and his leaders. The inability of the US Army to maintain small-unit integrity and stability strongly reinforces the transient nature of the small unit. Not only the individual replacement system but the failure to bind the soldier to his unit through traditional means and through positive unit control over the good things in a soldier's life hinders cohesion and contributes to the soldier's being controlled by actions and people beyond his unit.

Underlying this basic failure is a primary assumption of the volunteer Army: You can pay a person enough to be a good soldier. To assume that the soldier is primarily an economic man and can be motivated primarily through utilitarian means denies the US Army the strongest motivation possible on the battlefield—the small unit with its leader, held together by a common calling and strong and mutual expectations about the behavior of each other on the battlefield.

Outside the US Army, broad societal factors militate against the building of cohesive units. Disagreement over the past two

decades among American political, economic, and other elites about the proper US international role and about foreign policy goals has contributed significantly to the erosion of a supportive military ethos within the civilian elite.[1] This has been reflected in numerous ways that affect the Army's ability to create and maintain cohesive units. The end of the draft and the ease with which a soldier can presently escape the inconvenience and hardship of Army life and return to civilian life with little penalty hinder the promotion of cohesion.

The shift to an occupational model, rather than a vocational one, has tended to weaken the ideological national values that traditionally contributed to cohesion. Today's US soldiers tend to be recruited from those segments of the American populace with the least developed sense of civic consciousness and national values. These recruits are vaguely aware of the Presidency but have little other political knowledge. However, this appears to matter little, if at all, to defense policymakers, as long as quantitative recruiting objectives are met.[2]

The combined effects of recruitment policies, internal Army policies, and societal effects deny small-unit leaders the opportunity to build cohesive units. High recruit pay, permanent pass policies, liberal release policies, turbulence, social affiliation with outside groups, living off post, cost-effective barracks and messes, and many other factors identified earlier in this study all work to ensure that the small US unit remains a fragmented group unable to coalesce around its leaders to produce a cohesive unit.

Recommendations

Current organization and practices within the Army deny the US soldier the degree of social support from his fellow soldiers provided in other armies and necessary to build cohesive units able to compete as equals with those of possible enemies.

Sound principles observed in almost all other major armies for maximizing the human potential of soldiers have been sacrificed in the name of expediency to accommodate the perceived dictates of the American political and domestic environments. The American people must be asked to sacrifice if we are to field a capable, dependable Army. Current pronouncements as to the

good health of the Army are being made about an organization that has only successfully adapted to the imperatives of American domestic politics, not one that has been tested by the stress of war.

To create a cohesive Army with the desirable characteristics described in earlier chapters, significant changes must take place. Specifically, I recommend the following:

1. The US Armed Forces must return to the service motivation of earlier years that held that all Americans owe some contribution to the well-being of their country. As part of this approach, pay scales for all first-termers, enlisted and officers, should be reduced. Sergeants and officers should be representative of the best available in American society. Overall, the Army should be comprised of citizen soldiers representative of all strata of American society. This should be accompanied by a reemphasis on patriotism and a resocialization of American values that holds as a first principle that each American is responsible in some significant way for the continuation of a strong American democracy.
2. The US Army must assign soldiers and leaders to company and lower-level units permanently. The spare-parts mentality produced by the MOS system, one that allows soldiers of like MOS to be readily interchangeable, must no longer be the primary working principle of the Army's personnel management system. Company and lower-level units should be the objects of personnel management, not individual soldiers. In this regard, the regimental system misses the mark and should be deemphasized in favor of current test programs focusing on personnel stability in company and lower-level units.
3. The US Army must move away from the utilitarian or econometric system presently used to attract and motivate soldiers. Instead, the US soldier must draw his primary motivation from within his unit and from his immediate leaders. Mess halls, barracks, and other facilities as well as numerous other practices and personnel policies must be decentralized and restructured to turn the soldier toward his unit as the primary source for satisfying his social and security needs in his day-to-day life.

4. The US Army must initiate internal reforms to allow leaders, especially company-level officers, the authority to regain leadership control over the US soldier, his time, and his associations in order to permit the small-unit leader the opportunity to become the dominant influence in the day-to-day life of the US soldier.

A comprehensive set of recommendations that would fill out the main points outlined above would include most of the criteria for cohesion I have discussed throughout. The Army must turn from its drift into a utilitarian or econometric system for controlling and motivating soldiers. Over the past two decades, small-unit leaders have lost their ability to build and maintain unit cohesion as the Army adapted to cost-effectiveness measures and an unsympathetic domestic environment during the Vietnam years. The Congress, the courts, the executive branch, and even the Army initiated changes during the late 1960s and early 1970s in efforts to ease the Army's passage among increasingly hostile elements of American society. Accompanying these major changes was a significant shift in authority away from junior leaders at the squad, platoon, and company levels. To save money, attract recruits, and preclude "embarrassing incidents," authority was increasingly centralized at higher levels. This shift was reinforced by senior staffs who, sensing the trend, became very risk conscious and attempted to protect commanders with "safe-sided" advice, with resource managers, with judge advocate generals, and with public affairs officers especially, who gave counsel with little or no thought to effect on unit cohesion. Although this action protected the commander, it also made the task that he and lower-level leaders had of building cohesive, combat-ready units much more difficult. There are, of course, some drawbacks to decentralization. Local abuses resulting from increased authority can and will occur, but these are far outweighed by the benefits of decentralization.

The net effect of many of the changes over the years has been to make the junior leaders, especially the NCO, more of a bystander, as higher ranking officers reduced the junior leader's authority and curtailed much of his traditional responsibility. A recent Forces Command (FORSCOM) commander, General Shoemaker, recognized this problem, noting that "NCOs are not

fully utilized while commanders and other senior officers are working as hard as they can."

Accompanying this significant loss of authority and diminution of function over the past two decades have been other changes within the NCO corps. The soldier population within the All-Volunteer Army from which most NCOs are recruited is significantly less well-qualified than it was in previous years. A basic requisite for cohesion is that immediate leaders be recognized and respected as representative of the best a society has to offer. Those soldiers who are more representative of American society, however, tend not to reenlist and are lost as potential NCOs, leaving primarily "unrepresentative" soldiers as the main source of enlisted leaders. In fiscal year 1982, a good reenlistment year, approximately 47 percent of the US Army's reenlistments were in category IV, the category having the least qualified personnel.

The US Army must move to increase the quality of small-unit leadership by ensuring that NCOs are representative of American society and that NCO authority is restored to the degree necessary for building cohesive units. Many actions would promote this goal, but one of the most important is the restoration at squad and platoon levels of the NCO's authority to control his soldiers 24 hours a day. As a first step, such action means restoration of the pass as a privilege under NCO control.

The degree to which an army should be isolated from the society that supports it has long been a question among military sociologists. There doesn't appear to be a definitive answer, even for a particular army. One answer depends upon the degree to which surrounding societal values support the small-unit norms necessary for cohesion. Within the Israeli, North Vietnamese, and Soviet armies, soldiers are isolated to the degree necessary for the leader and group to become the dominant influence in the soldier's daily life. The Soviet Army requires significantly more isolation than the Israeli Army, which receives very strong societal support for its

unit norms. In the North Vietnamese Army, isolation varied. In the North and in areas in the South under firm North Vietnamese control, isolation of soldiers was not extensive. In South Vietnam, where much of the population was reluctant to support either side, North Vietnamese Army isolation was much more pronounced. Presently, the US Army needs to institutionalize a greater degree of isolation in order to allow small-unit leaders to regain control of their units and build cohesion. Such isolation need not be extensive and probably would not exceed the isolation necessary in the 1950s and the early 1960s, when low pay, NCO authority, and other factors tended to orient the US soldier toward his unit 24 hours a day.

A related recommendation is to regain from the courts and the Judge Advocate General authority for NCOs to maintain discipline in their own right. They should not have to clear their actions with higher commanders through an unwieldy and unresponsive military justice system that has decreased the leader's authority by placing priority on individual rights over unit discipline and cohesion. It is time to return to the principle of past years; it is in accordance with democratic tradition that soldiers give up some of their individual rights while they serve. At the same time, it must also be recognized that the principles of war are autonomous—they operate independently of political or social system. Neither democracy nor any other form of government is assured an army more capable than another's. This is especially true when citizens in a democracy forget that personal sacrifices are necessary to build an army and when they become increasingly self-indulgent—lacking the self-discipline necessary to fulfill their responsibilities, while missing few opportunities to assert their rights.